

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill 6616, An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status

Zena Ahmed, M.S.

Hearing of Human Services Committee

February 14th, 2023

SUBJECT: H.B. No. 6616 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF HUSKY HEALTH BENEFITS TO THOSE INELIGIBLE DUE TO IMMIGRATION STATUS

Dear Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, Senator Gaston, Representative Dathan and other Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Zena Ahmed and what follows is my testimony in strong support of Raised Bill H.B. 6616 titled “AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF HUSKY HEALTH BENEFITS TO THOSE INELIGIBLE DUE TO IMMIGRATION STATUS.”

I am a current second-year graduate student at the Yale School of Public Health, focusing on Health Policy with a background in Biology and a Master’s in Translational Medicine. I am a current resident of New Milford, Connecticut, and I pay particular attention to the needs of the undocumented community. My relationship to this community is that I have family members who are undocumented who also struggle to receive healthcare coverage. I have witnessed my family members’ struggle and sacrifice in choosing to cross the border to live a safer and happier life. I would like to think that their legal status in the United States of America should not affect their health status. For that to be the case, however, my family members and other undocumented residents in Connecticut should not be denied access to the HUSKY healthcare insurance coverage provided to other income-eligible and otherwise-uninsured residents.

Expanding HUSKY to include all youth, irrespective of immigration status, is significant and necessary to our immigrant community. Why should the undocumented community be denied any longer of their fundamental human right, their right to health? The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the World Health Organization state that “regardless of our age, gender, socio-economic or ethnic background, we consider our health to be our most basic and essential asset.”¹ If two of the biggest agencies in the world recognize the importance of health and health services rendered to everyone, why should Connecticut - one of the wealthiest states in one of the wealthiest nations in the world - be an exception?

Accessibility to healthcare is a fundamental human right for undocumented families. As we come out of this pandemic, we must remember the additional health burden that the pandemic placed on all communities. Do we remember the financial cutbacks, months of being

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Factsheet31.pdf>

unemployed, and having noncommunicable diseases while being at risk for COVID-19? If US citizens were worried about their healthcare, what about the undocumented community? Where can they go if they have no access healthcare coverage? Must they turn to our state's emergency rooms once their health problems have grown dire, and the treatment needed even more expensive?

Some in this very committee may argue against this bill and I would like to emphasize that investing in healthcare coverage for the immigrant community, is a long-term investment for Connecticut and will most likely reduce healthcare costs to approximately \$63 million.²

The state of Connecticut has the power to decide who is eligible for HUSKY healthcare and the types of services which the public has access. I want to emphasize that the undocumented community in Connecticut pays roughly 145 million dollars in state and local taxes every year.³ As Patrick Henry notoriously wrote, "No taxation without representation!" Since the undocumented community are state taxpayers, they too should be provided access to HUSKY health coverage.

In sum, I urge the Committee to support this bill to further expand HUSKY health benefits to the immigrant youth irrespective of their immigration status. I would like to note that Governor Lamont shares the General Assembly's commitment to expanding HUSKY, as his proposed budget continues the funding for "a nearly \$8 billion HUSKY Health program (Medicaid and HUSKY B) that serves low-income and medically-needy individuals, including significant expansions in recent years for children and pregnant women who would not have previously qualified due to their citizenship status"⁴ and ARPA funding of \$500,000 "for capital grants to purchase or upgrade mobile vans for the free clinics operating in Connecticut that provide mobile health care" and provides health services to undocumented individuals who may not qualify for HUSKY.⁵

Thank you for the opportunity in providing a written testimony on this bill. I would love to answer any questions or concerns you may have, so feel free to reach me at zena.ahmed@yale.edu.

Sincerely,
Zena Ahmed, M.S.

² Rao P, Girosi F, Eibner C. Expanding Insurance Coverage to Undocumented Immigrants in Connecticut. *Rand Health Q.* 2022 Nov 14;10(1):3. Page 18. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1964-1.html

³Gee L, Gardner M, Hill M, Wiehe M. Undocumented Immigrants' State and Local Tax Contributions. Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy. March 2017. p. 3, <https://itep.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/immigration2017.pdf>

⁴Governor's FY 2024-2025 Budget Proposal, p. 3, https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/Budget/2024_2025_Biennial_Budget/Budget_WebPage/GovBudget_2024-25_Final-Web-Version.pdf

⁵Ibid. at p. 32.